



# Gender Discrimination in the novel *Lady Coupe* of Anita Nair: As Thematic Study

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**Abstract:** The distinctness between male and female is a reality and deeply persisting in Indian psyche and social system. Gender based discrimination is the out - come of Indian social - culture, traditions and more over patriarchal society. Indian middle - class women are the victim of gender biased society that shake their identity and psyche. The purpose of the research paper is to highlight the issues related to gender discrimination of the women characters in the novel *Lady Coupe*. Anita Nair is one of the prolific women writers to present women perspective in her novels and her characters suffer a lot of being women. The novel is also a panorama of Indian middle - class uneducated as well as well educated women those suffer familiar under orthodox restrictions and ultra - conservative society.

**Keywords:** gender, women, discrimination, patriarchal, psyche, conservative.

Men and women are integral part of any society and nature never differentiates between both. It is patriarchal envision that developed the notion of men supremacy in the society. Women are always considered as subordinate to men and that assumption exploited women since ages. Gender discrimination means when someone is treated unequally or negatively on the basis of gender. Gender although is state of male or female being on the ground of their part in social and cultural norms. Since, ancient time women are supposed to perform house-hold duties and other part is procreation and even today is not different from that. Men hold power and position on various resources to subordinate females till past. They project women as inferior, powerless, and discriminated one. Kate Millet's subordination theory argues that "women are the dependent sex class under patriarchal domination" (Millet 121).

The bias social system privileged male with extreme power and supremacy that they reduce the existence of female in the family and society. The social conditioning of both genders generates narrow minded and orthodox mentality. Since childhood, we generally address girls as inferior and weak, and that happens due to patriarchal thinking that is settled in the brain consciously or unconsciously. Allen and Barbra write in *Why Men don't Listen Women and Women can't read Maps*:

To baby girls, we softly say, 'You're so sweet,' 'You're a little sweetheart,' 'You're a beautiful little girl,' and to baby boys, we raise our voices and say, 'Hey, big boy!' and 'Wow, you're so strong!' (Pease & Pease 27).

The girls are supposed to be sweet and soft need to be protected and pampered in the family, but boys are considered brave and fearless. It leads the way to the process of the psychological and mental setup of society. This attitude is the social conditioning and environment of the place that directly or indirectly affects the human psyche. It is also cause of much discrimination on women as rape, molestation, psychological stress and social insecurity and so on.

Women's status as an individual and her equality in the society is constantly a controversial and a debated issue. As literature is the mirror of the society that presents women unpleasant experiences of women as subject women authors. Indian women writers in contemporary scenario projecting gender inequality in society. Indian Feminist writers are concerned to protest for women rights and equality in the society. Anita Nair is one of them prolific author who has successful career in Indian English literature. She is known for her artistic creativity in the form of novels and short stories. Her book *Lady Coupe* bagged its position in the top five books of the year 2002 and translated in many other languages across the world.

The novel *Lady Coupe* is story of six women Akhilandeswari (Akhila), Janaki Prabhakar, Margaret Paulraj, Sheela Vasudevan, Prabha Devi, and Marikolanthu. The tragedy of life is that they all belong to different places, cultures, religions, and identities but faced the same pains and miseries in their lives. There is no doubt that a woman's condition is not improved yet and exploited in various ways or forms in the patriarchal society. Sunita Sinha comments that "Nair's India suffers from a patriarchal system which has tried in many ways to repress, humiliate and debase women. The question she poses in the novel not only shakes the ideological ground of man's patriarchal role in our traditional society but also imply the existence of alternative reality" (149)

Nair presents the deteriorated Indian patriarchal social system that suppressed and exploited women in every possible way. The author raises question on the gender intolerance society in her novels. The social system conditioning is the base of their whole life and their thinking because male and female can never be equal. Women are conditioned as to serve for their master husband but husbands are never supposed to initiate mutual respect in married life. The acceptance of master and servant always remain more or less in every Indian female psyche. Akhila's mother advised her to act like a good wife if she wishes to have a peaceful life.

Amma said 'It is the best to accept that the wife is inferior to husband. That's the way, there can be no strife, no disharmony. It is when one wants to prove one's equality there is a warring and sparring all the time. It is so much easier and simpler to accept one's station in life and live accordingly (14).

Akhila is an educated working woman of 44 years and still a spinster. She suppressed her individuality and freedom only for her family. Death of her father strained her life. She fulfils every duty towards her family, but lives a life of alienation and negligence. Her family never asks her about her wishes and even about her marriage to gratify their financial needs. Being an independent woman, she is literary, not free or independent to take the decisions of her life. She wishes to live her life on her own terms but, she is unable to do so. Akhila thinks, "She was always an extension of someone else's identity. Chandra's daughter; Narayan's Akka; Priya's aunt; Murty's sister -in - law ... Akhila wished for once someone would see her as a whole being (200-201). A female is considered as shadow of a man and seeks her individual existence in society. Woman has no independent identity because she is subordinate to male. Her concept of a new woman trodden under the feet of the conventional social setup that never free from obligations. All the other female characters of the coupe are also presented as victims of a biased or patriarchal society.

First, there was my father and my brothers; then my husband. When my husband is gone, there will be my son. "Waiting to take off from where his father left off. Women like me end up being fragile. Our men treat us like princesses. And because of that, we look down upon women who are strong and who can cope by themselves. Do you understand what I am saying? (22-23).

Janki Prabhakar is a perfect woman as a daughter, wife, and caring mother but controlled or protected by male domination in the form of a father or husband. Women in the patriarchal society are made to depend on males in families, and they never let them free or independent. Females dwell in society as puppets in the hands of males who exploit them and express their possession of them as property or wealth. It is such a selfish motif to tame females to never come out of their shells and become independent and it passes through one generation to the next.

The female child abuse is another dark secret of the male dominated society. Sheela narrates the tale of life from the age of fourteen years how elder male exploited her physically but the terror of insecurity never passed from her psyche. The biased social setup considered it a social shame for girls or women rather than the males who commit the brutal act. Society looks down on females as they blunder to have a female body; it also affects marriage or married life even their entire life.

Naazar was her friend's father and her father's friend. His daughter Hassina was her classmate. One Sunday afternoon, when Sheela went to their house, rushing in from heat with a line of sweat beading her upper lips, Naazar had reached forward and wiped it with his forefinger. The touch of his finger tingled on her skin a long time (66).

There are many near and dear relationships, especially female child abuse, male lust that ashamed humanity, and morality. Men are man-eaters from the cradle to the grave, proved by the behaviour of Naazar. This tale that is a matter of great concern and even no girl or women would like to share or revive those incidents that leave them under sinister threat.

Even educated women are not free from exploitation and subjugation. Margret Shanthi, a gold medallist in M.Sc. Chemistry and wants to be a doctorate. Her husband, Ebenezer Paulraj, vice-principal of a school, discarded her wishes and advised her; "What's the point in working for a doctorate? Do your B.Ed. so you can become a teacher, and then we will always be together"(LC105). Being teacher of chemistry she compares herself to supercritical water, capable of dissolving just about anything into it. Her husband changed her psychology and filled her with hatred and revenge instead of love and compassion. Her husband wants to control and lead her life as superior, and she should follow him without any question. Her subjectivity matters nowhere in her own life that is a such a curse that a woman's dreams and aspirations are still slave of male domination it may be in the form of father, brother or a husband.

Gender discrimination also effects girls education because it is mere a formality to find a good match for marriage. Girls do not require any individual economic status because educated daughter is a jewel of the high social status. Prabha Devi, the daughter of a wealthy family and has a great childhood. She grew up as a beautiful girl with the features of a good cook, singer, and needlework speaks itself. She sent to school not to enlighten her-self but to glorify the status of her family. 'The nuns will groom her well. Besides, if we have find a good alliance for her, she should able to speak proper English and look a little fashionable,' Her father sends her to convent school so that nuns to groom her instead assist her to enable her economically independent. Her parents tied her knot with a diamond merchant's single son Jagdeesh, a good - looking man. One day after forty-four, she realizes that she is all a good wife, mother, daughter -in-law and what after that she is? This introspection of herself strikes her soundly, and she thinks to justify it by fulfilling her dream of swimming. The orthodox thinking of family and fear of social shame demolish women's personal choices and hobbies.

Poverty is foremost reason of gender discrimination in Indian society. Many poor girls and women work in the rich people's houses to earn their livelihood but unfortunately becomes victim of their lust. Marikolunthu is a fifth woman who is also a victim of man's lust that spoils

her entire life. She worked with her mother in Chettiar's house and raped there one of their relatives. 'No one will believe you. You might think you are our equal, but you are not I'm the Chettiar's nephew, his daughter - in law's brother, and you are only the cook's daughter. No one will dare question me.' Her rape made her unmarried mother to face social and emotional disgrace. The curse of male dominated society is worst enough that none dare to point a finger towards male.

Marikolunthu, as unmarried girl becomes a mother of a child and still unable to understand how to take it as a blessing or curse that changed her sense of motherhood. As quoted by Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, "Motherhood in particular is respected only in the married woman; the unwed mother remains an object of scandal, and a child is a severe handicap for her"(Beauvoir 508). The society does not respect an unmarried girl because she held responsible for all misdeed. Her unwanted child is another cause of her punishment till she dies. Her heart comes to her mouth whenever she recalls her past that ruined her present and future. She says that "I was a restless spirit warped and bitter. Sometimes I would think of the past and I would feel a quickening in the vacuum that existed within me now" (LC 266). Her past fills her with at most guilt and wish to get rid of that experience of her life.

Self subjugation among women is also something that should be talked about. In the beginning of the novel, the character of Akhila is a huge example of self-subjugation in the Indian society. She keeps others life and happiness above her own which leads to them taking her for granted. Her mind is set on the assumption that, "A woman can't live alone. A woman can't cope alone" (LC 16) She never supposes to live without her family's social security. She wishes that "I had to grow a shell around myself. To protect myself. To deflect hurt or pain. If I hadn't I would have gone insane" (LC 41). Her wishes are different from social perspective. Every individual is just an individual with innumerable amount of flaws in him or her. It isn't necessary to sit on the pedestal that society has made for women. A woman can make her own place in the world is something seen in books, but never talked about? The system of patriarchy and the grips of it are so strong and so entangled in human minds that society even hate to think of someone stepping a mile away from the "good girl" line, and if a woman brave and courageous chooses to go her own way, even the womenfolk fails to understand her thoughts and feelings.

Be good in everyone's eyes, be answerable to all questions asked, a good mother, a good daughter etc. are like the basis of reputation of the family. Even in the novel when Akhila says she wants to travel, her own sister says it'd be dangerous for her to travel alone, rather than supporting her and her decision. If a woman doesn't feel like doing the domestic chores someday, it's fine. But do they have a choice, is always unanswered and neglect.

The journey of Indian women in can never free from subjugation and exploitation in society. All the women characters of the novel are victim of gender discrimination and surviving as neglected and as other in the society. The protagonist of the novel Akhila realizes of her shrinking individuality as the other five in the novel. The one night in the company of five women changed the perspective of protagonist's towards life. She has less hope to overcome from the complications and chances of survival in the dark. There some female characters who dare to fight, but some don't dare to challenge the circumstances. There is no doubt time changed or modified the thinking of human beings, but it is materialistic, not rational. The condition of middle- class women in society is as their hearts are about to burst due to suppression of their feelings and aspirations. But the social restrictions keep them mum from crying loudly or publically. The paper is about to present those wounded souls of women who want to overcome but the sick mentality of society that always marginalized them since ages.

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